

GAIRLOCH AND WESTER LOCH EWE COMMUNITY

Third party Bid for a Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area

In the Loch Ewe – Loch Gairloch area



Photo of Loch Gairloch by Jeremy Fenton

Prepared on behalf of the local
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Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

Gairloch & Wester Loch Ewe Community Third party bid for a Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area.

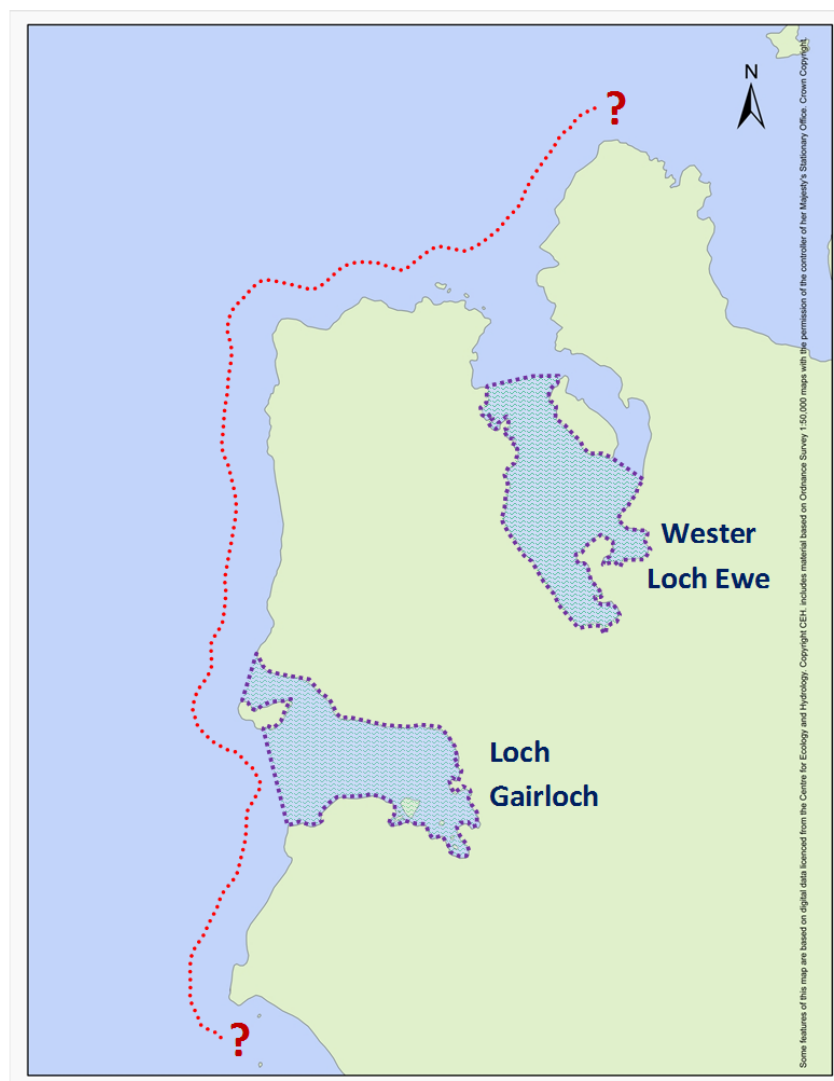
1. Introduction

Our Third Party bid is for the designation of a nature conservation Marine Protected Area (ncMPA) for Loch Gairloch and part of Loch Ewe within a larger research and demonstration MPA.

Our aim is to protect and restore important marine wildlife assets, including fish and shellfish populations and marine bird and mammal populations of primary importance to the local economy. We wish to protect MPA search feature habitats and species within Loch Gairloch, and to protect recovering MPA search feature habitats and species within a part of Loch Ewe.

Figure 1 shows the two areas for proposed ncMPA designation.

Figure 1. Proposed Two Lochs Marine Protected Area, comprising the proposed Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas of Wester Loch Ewe and Loch Gairloch (areas within purple lines); and an area being considered for a separate Third Party research and demonstration Marine Protected Area bid (red line). See following text for further explanation.



Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

The two areas which we are proposing for ncMPA designation are:

1. Loch Gairloch, inside the existing no-mobile gear zone. This sea loch has many MPA search features and supports other wildlife of nature conservation importance, including otter, Black-throated Diver, Red-throated Diver and many other sea birds. The area supports a creel fishery, and formerly was noted for sea angling; British record rod-caught Plaice and Dab were caught in the Sound of Longa. Gairloch is a centre for marine wildlife tourism which is of vital importance for the local economy.

2. Wester Loch Ewe. The area proposed for ncMPA designation comprises waters and the seabed to the south of a line where the anti-submarine net was located in the Second World War, and waters to the west of Isle Ewe, south to Poolewe, including Loch Thurnaig. This area has a similar range of wildlife and MPA search features to Loch Gairloch. However some seabed habitats including maerl beds have been degraded in the past 20 years by mobile fishing gear following the removal of the 3-mile ban. The area is of importance to juvenile fish populations and sea birds, and has and can support a dive-fishery for scallops (instead of dredging). The area has great wildlife tourism value and potential with NTS Inverewe Garden and Estate providing several km of shoreline. The area is a principle feeding area for the sea trout of Loch Maree, formerly Scotland's premier sea trout loch. Current activities include a salmon farm by Isle Ewe, which is not considered to be an issue of concern to the protection of MPA search features.

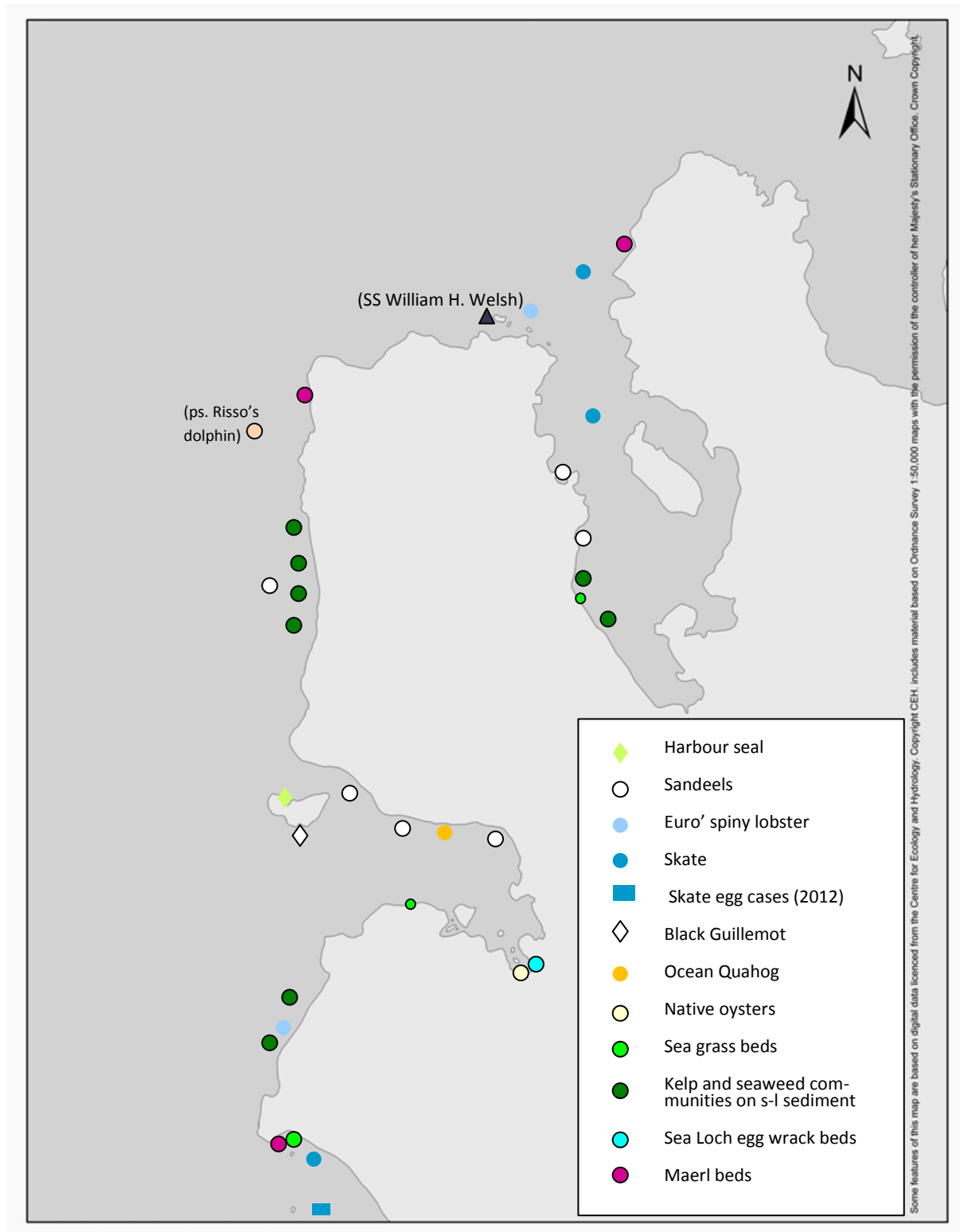
In parallel with this bid for a ncMPA, we aim to develop a bid for a more extensive area to be included within a research and demonstration MPA (r&dMPA) an area of coastal waters possibly extending between Red Point and Greenstone Point (possibly linking to areas with other designations to the north (Gruinard Bay) and south (Loch Torridon). The overall aim of the larger proposed r&dMPA area, which will overlap the two proposed ncMPA areas, is to investigate and demonstrate the most effective and sustainable fisheries and wildlife management measures to maximise the overall wildlife & productive fisheries value of this coastal area for the local community and for Scotland. This separate bid, including locations of proposed boundaries, will be developed and submitted following further guidance

This area also includes the wreck of the American Liberty Ship, the SS William H. Welsh, which was a subject of much attention during the recent Russian Arctic Convoys week, and is of both Historic and Nature Conservation interest.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

Figure 3 shows the location of MPA search features that have been noted by members of local community, and for which further assessment may be required.

Figure 3 Additional location of MPA search features that have been recorded since April 2012, and for which further assessment may be require (also showing location of wreck).



Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

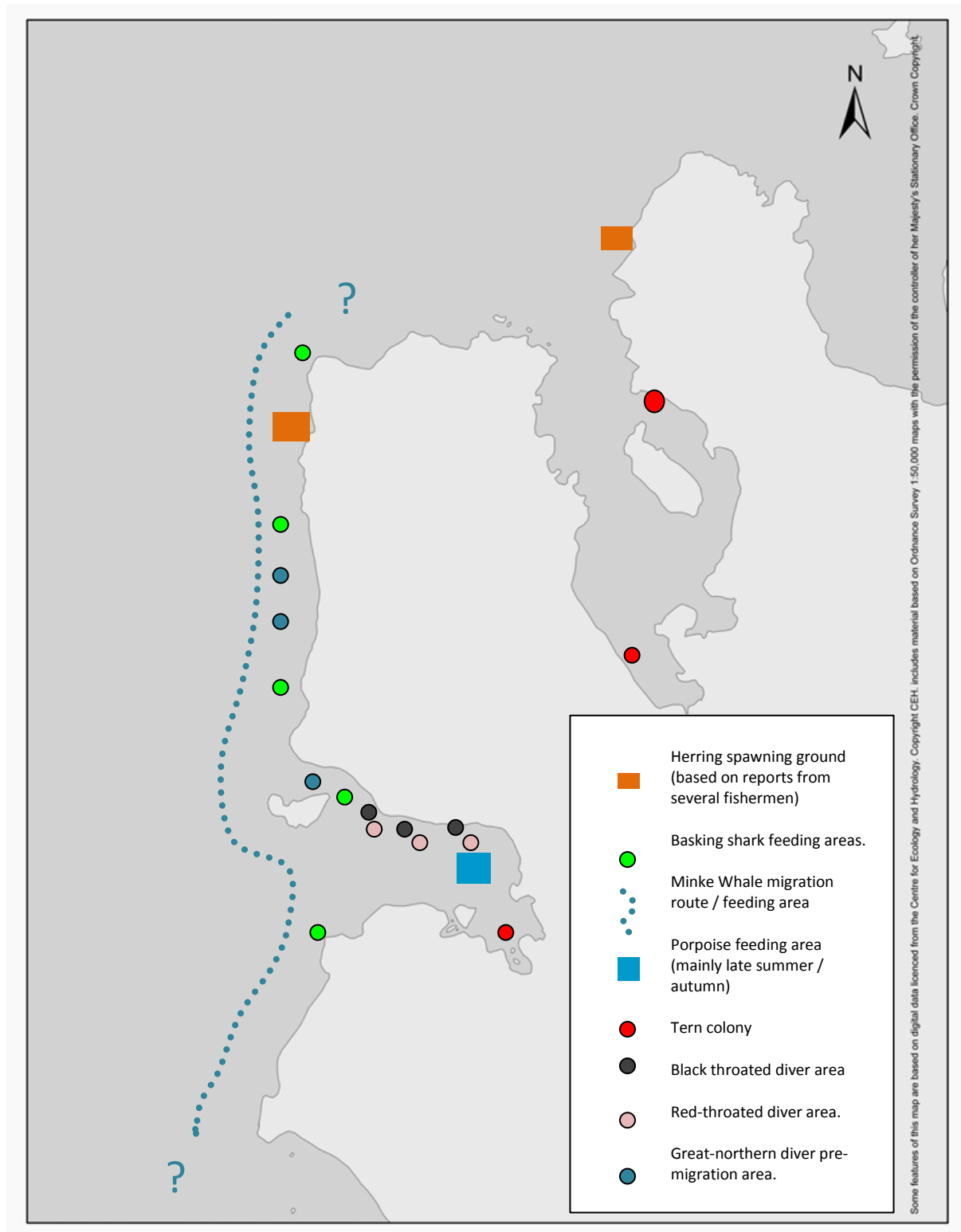
Notes of additional MPA search feature records (see Figure 3):

- Harbour seal: There is a haul-out at the northwest tip of Longa Island and in Sheildaig Bay.
- Sandeels: these can be recorded around the whole coastline, with at least two species (including Greater Sandeel) present during summer months. Sandeels are a vital food source for other marine wildlife. The northern and eastern shores of Loch Gairloch and western bays in Loch Ewe are places frequented by terns, divers and other birds that feed on sandeels.
- European spiny lobster: These have supported a small tangle net fishery in recent years around the mouth of Loch Ewe. A similar fishery has been operated out of Loch Gairloch.
- Common Skate: these have been seen by divers in last two years in Loch Ewe and outer Loch Torridon, and reported by trawl fishermen in nearby waters. Large egg cases, thought to be those of Common Skate were reported on the sea bed in outer Loch Torridon in February 2012.
- Black Guillemot: good numbers breed around Longa island.
- Ocean Quahog: live animal and freshly dead shells found in north side of Loch Gairloch to south of Lonemore in 2011 & 2012. There are also reports of ocean quahogs from the head of Loch Gairloch.
- Native oysters: the number observed in Shieldaig Bay in May 2012 was estimated at between 100 and 1000 animals, some as small as 5cm in length.
- Sea grass beds: small beds recorded between slipways at Naast in May 2012. A small bed reported by 3 divers between Badantional and Badachro on south side of Loch Gairloch; a sea horse was seen here in 2010. A small bed has been located near the beach to south of Red Point, where in 2009 much sea grass was washed up on the strandline suggesting a much larger eel grass bed exists nearby.
- Kelp and seaweed communities on sub-littoral sediment: an extensive area of kelp to west and south of Melvaig was recently surveyed by the MV Seabeam in relation to cable laying (Feb 2012). Details of this seabed survey are awaited. This area is one of the most important lobster grounds. Opinan: a similar area to the north of Red Point is also considered to be of high biodiversity value by local scallop divers. In Loch Ewe some bivalve rich burrowed sediment with kelp is found around the mouth of Inverasdale burn.
- Sea Loch Egg Wrack: this covers an area of several 10s of m² in Loch Sheildaig.
- Maerl beds: these have been badly damaged to west of Carr Point and Opinan by scallop dredgers in past 20 years. To west of Peterburn an extensive area was targeted by scallop dredgers in May 2012. Minch herring are reported by many fishermen to spawn on maerl to the south of Red Point and to the south of Greenstone Point (see Figure 4).

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

Figure 4 shows the location of some additional features of biodiversity, fisheries and conservation importance which partly depend upon the occurrence of MPA search features.

Figure 4. Some additional biodiversity features that relate to occurrence of MPA search features. See text for further details.



Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

Notes on some additional features of biodiversity, fisheries and conservation importance.

- Herring spawning grounds: Loch Gairloch was designated as a no-mobile gear zone in 1984 partly to protect spawning herring. Although there are some anecdotal reports of a herring spawning ground near Shildaig Bay in Loch Gairloch, experienced fishermen who have fished for herring over several decades all report that the most important spawning grounds for herring are to the north of Melvaig around Sron na Cleite. Another spawning ground is located in the bay to south of Gob a Chuaille. Herring are said to spawn on 'coral' (maerl) at the former location; and eggs have been reported sticking to kelp by one fisherman at the latter location. These areas are said to be used by Minch herring to spawn in March. These areas should be surveyed as a matter of some urgency.
- Basking sharks: these are seen regularly in summer months, feeding in areas where currents converge. Over 10 animals have been recorded on a single day feeding between Rhu Reidh and Loch Gairloch. They often feed close to the shore (as recently as 25 & 26th May 2012).
- Minke Whale: these are regularly seen between Red Point and Rhu Reidh, along a line approximately 1 mile to the west of the mainland. Some of these animals are thought to be on migration. Minke whales occur every year in areas closer to the shore including Loch Gairloch. There have also been occasional sightings of Humpback, Sei and Fin whales along this line in the past 4 years. A group of 6+ Risso's Dolphin (including calf) were seen feeding 2km to south west of Rhu Reidh in late summer 2011 (see figure 3).
- Harbour Porpoise: records obtained via Peter Evans show that porpoises have been seen in every part of Loch Gairloch and beyond. Every year, family groups of porpoises have remained within Loch Gairloch for several weeks at a time towards the end of summer and early autumn. Do they target sandeels, herring or other fish in Loch Gairloch at this time of year? Porpoises were also the most frequently observed species during systematic land-based surveys conducted from Melvaig. There was variation in sightings rates between spring and autumn and foraging behaviour was exhibited in 13% of sightings (Dolman et al., submitted)
- Tern breeding colonies: the most productive breeding colony in 2011 was on the concrete quay by Mellon Charles in Loch Ewe (Arctic Tern). Birds from here fished within the proposed Wester Loch Ewe MPA area. Terns have also breed in Loch Gairloch (Fraoch Eilean and Glas Eilean – mainly Common Tern) and on Boor Rocks in Loch Ewe, where chicks were reared to near fledgling size, but then failed in 2011.
- Other bird islands: the islands of Longa and Eilean Furach, and cliffs near Rhu Reidh supported many more breeding birds in past decades than at present according to local residents, some of whom ate them or their eggs. Birds which bred within the area in the past included Storm Petrel and Kittiwake. Numbers of breeding sea birds on these islands have fallen in recent years for reasons which are not understood, though may include presence of rats, and predation by White-tailed Eagle (?and mink) in addition to factors relating to a decline in food availability in coastal seas.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- Divers: both Black and Red-throated divers breed within Wester Ross, including Loch Maree SPA & Wester Ross Lochs SPA. Up to 20 Black-throated divers have been seen feeding together in Loch Gairloch along the north shore. [In the past week (May 2012) a group of 10 birds has been feeding in this area.] Several pairs of Red-throated Diver also nest around Loch Gairloch, flying inland in early summer to feed chicks on sandeels caught within the loch. Great northern divers are present in both lochs in winter and spring months. To the west of Aultgrishan and Melvaig, an estimated 40 Great Northern Divers were seen within an area of approximately 2km² in May 2011.

3. Management Issues

Guideline 3: An MPA as the best means of addressing the management issues which have been identified by the third party

We believe that ncMPA designation is the best way to protect biodiversity and the livelihoods that depend on it. An ncMPA will raise awareness of the biodiversity importance of the area, can help to promote and underpin sustainable resource use, and can help to facilitate resolution of conflicts between different fisheries sectors and tourism businesses. Here we summarise the main issues and opportunities:

- **Protecting the seabed from damage by mobile fishing gear**

The main issue is damage to sea bed habitats from mobile fishing gear, currently scallop dredgers which have broken and ground down maerl beds and other sea bed habitats over the past 25 years following the removal of the '3-mile limit', to the detriment of other wildlife including fish populations of fisheries and wildlife tourism importance. Formerly suction dredgers also operated in some waters for other bivalves. Our aim is to recover a portion of what has been damaged or lost.

Loch Gairloch was designated as a no-mobile gear zone under the Scottish Inshore Fisheries Act in 1984, to protect spawning herring and juvenile fish populations. There are several reasons why designation of a Marine Protected Area may be more appropriate than the current designation.

Firstly, there is no evidence that as a fisheries management measure the designation of such a small area has been effective. There are no confirmed reports of herring spawning within Loch Gairloch. Local fishermen report that the main spawning area for herring was between Melvaig and Greenstone Point on 'coral' substrate (maerl), in an area which has not been protected from mobile fishing gear. There has been very little if any monitoring of herring or juvenile fish populations in the loch since the area was designated.

Secondly, however, as a nature conservation measure, the no-mobile gear zone has afforded seabed habitats including maerl beds and sea grass beds greater protection than those outwith the no-mobile gear zone where there has been much damage to the seabed and associated biodiversity. In other words, the current designation has been successful in achieving nature conservation objectives rather than fisheries management objectives, in line with MPA status.

Thirdly, some local creel fishermen have expressed concern that trawlers and dredgers have infringed upon the no-mobile gear zone. Concern has been expressed that the zone has not been adequately policed. Their view is that designation as an MPA will raise local awareness of sea bed

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

habitats and the status of the loch, and that will help to deter further breaches of the no-mobile gear zone. As things stand, it is difficult to generate interest and awareness within the wider community of the nature conservation significance of the existing designation. MPA designation could strengthen compliance within the existing no-mobile gear zone.

For a MPA to be successful for the Loch Gairloch area, it is crucially important that the local fishing community is closely involved in any management decisions and fully supportive of any measures proposed to safeguard the seabed habitats that the MPA aims to protect. At least one creeler has expressed concern that in another part of Scotland, creeling restrictions were 'imposed' on a local fishing community following protected area designation.

Loch Ewe currently has no protection from scallop dredging. Scallop divers report considerable damage to seabed habitats within the loch in the past 20 years, including loss of fan shells (according to one diver). In the last 6 years, dredgers are said to have operated within Loch Ewe only as far south as Sgeir and Araig (north of Isle Ewe). There is therefore an opportunity to protect the recovering habitats to the east of Inverasdale and south to Poolewe, including degraded maerl beds with flameshells and horse mussels from further damage. These sheltered waters can be easily dived for scallops which can be selectively collected by hand.

Shallow areas (<20m) around the nearby coastline, to the west of Aultgrishan and south to and around Red Point are also areas worked by scallop divers who report considerable damage to seabed habitats over the past 20 years.

- **Resolution of conflicts between different fishing sectors**

The scallop dredging fishery conflicts with the scallop diving fishery and the local creel fishery for crabs and lobsters. Protection of sea bed habitats that are MPA search features would enable more extensive areas to be designated for scallop diving. Scallop divers selectively harvest scallops causing less damage to the seabed and other shellfish. MPA designation would also protect crab and lobster populations which support creel fisheries, and other fish and shellfish populations of economic importance.

- **Disturbance of wildlife (and protecting livelihoods for today and tomorrow)**

This is an issue of concern for cetaceans, seals and sea birds. The two cetacean species using the area are the Harbour Porpoise and Minke Whale. Both species are of economic importance for Loch Gairloch as they are major attractions for wildlife tourism businesses, which bring at least **£1 million [to confirm]** worth of business to the local area each year. Harbour Porpoise have been monitored within Loch Gairloch and nearby waters for 30+ years, and family groups are seen each year particularly toward the latter part of the summer and early part of the autumn in Loch Gairloch.

Nearby freshwater lochs, including Loch Maree, are designated as Special Areas of Protection (SPA) for breeding Black-throated Diver under EU legislation. These birds are regularly seen in both Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe in groups of up to 20. Red-throated divers which are also on Annex 1 of the EU Habitats and Species Directive nest in or by nearby hill lochans and use Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe to feed. Terns have bred on Glas Eilean and other islands in Loch Gairloch and in Loch Ewe.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

Disturbance can be caused by military activity nearby, particularly during naval exercises when loud under water sonar devices are being tested, and by boat traffic, including pleasure boat traffic which is expected to increase in the future. MPA designation would provide a forum and management framework for local stakeholders including boat operators to express concerns and engage in the development of the most appropriate management measures to safeguard both their own commercial interests and the wildlife and wildlife habitats, including MPA features that support them.

- Collection of Oysters

Oyster beds may have been over-collected in the past. MPA designation can help to raise awareness of their conservation status and foster actions to restore beds.

- Anchor damage

Naval ships and cruise ships drop anchor in Loch Ewe and to a lesser extent in Loch Gairloch, and can thereby damage the sea bed. There is local demand for an increase in moorings to be available for local and visiting pleasure boats. We do not believe that continued use of both lochs by larger boats is incompatible with MPA designation; to the contrary, MPA designation can add to the value of the area and help to attract visiting boats. A solution, beyond the scope of this proposal would be placement of floating pontoons or other fixed moorings in areas where excessive anchor damage could otherwise threaten habitats and species of nature conservation importance.

- Promotion of marine wildlife tourism

Both Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe have much to offer sea kayakers, snorkelers and divers, in addition to organised wildlife tours. MPA designation can help to safeguard and restore the habitats and species that enrich the sustainable wildlife tourism experience above and below the water. Around Inverewe Estate by Loch Ewe, in addition to the shoreline, NTS also owns the foreshore. NTS is therefore able to create byelaws for land that it owns and could potentially exercise some control over this part of the sea.

- Restoring and sustaining angling for sea fish and the Loch Maree sea trout fishery

A nature conservation MPA can contribute to the restoration of fish populations for sea anglers by protecting habitats for juvenile and adult fish, and the Loch Maree sea trout fishery, by providing more food for sea trout and alternative prey species for predators of sea trout. Both fisheries were formerly of considerable local economic importance.

- Raising awareness of marine issues within the younger generation.

Nearby primary schools comprise Poolewe, Bualnaluib (Aultbea), Inverasdale and Gairloch. Gairloch also has a high school, situated close to the proposed MPA area. We would seek to ensure that young people are represented on a MPA management group to enable them to develop the knowledge and skills for future sustainable management of coastal areas and future employment within the MPA area.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- Wester Ross Biosphere proposal

The MPA would fit well with the objectives of the wider Wester Ross Biosphere proposal currently being developed by Wester Ross Alliance.

- Sustainable economic development

We believe that the financial benefits to the area and to Scotland as a whole will be greater than the costs of MPA designation and implementation, especially if local stakeholders are able to participate fully in the management and monitoring of a Marine Protected Area. Given basic training fishermen, wildlife tour boat operators and voluntary groups can collect the data upon which the success of MPA designation can be assessed; restoration of fish and shellfish populations will add value to local fisheries; MPA designation will provide additional opportunities for attracting visitors to an area which already has many high quality facilities including accommodation and sea-food restaurants.

4. Support for a MPA

Guideline 5: Quantifying level of support for the proposal

The bid is being led by a group of residents who have contributed most of the time required to carry out the background work including discussions with local stakeholders and community groups.

We have consulted widely within the local community; we plan to publicise our bid and seek support from elsewhere in Scotland within the next few weeks.

Support from some sectors is qualified according to their perceived understanding of how MPAs will be designated and for whom. At the current time, there is still some uncertainty as to how MPAs will be implemented and managed. Support for MPA designation to achieve both local and national objectives will be strongest if local stakeholders are active participants within the MPA management forum.

The following bullet points summarise aspects of support in more detail:

- **Publicity:** Our bid has already been publicised on local media (Two Lochs Radio and Gairloch and District Times) and at a public meeting in Gairloch on 7 May 2012. At this meeting of local stakeholders including members of the wider community there was unanimous support for MPA designation, except for a few who abstained. We still have much work to do to raise levels of awareness and understanding of our bid especially within areas beyond Wester Ross; a press release will be distributed shortly following completion of the bid. On 8 May the local Wester Ross biodiversity group, WREN agreed to provide website facilities for publicising the MPA bid. The WREN website has just been redeveloped and we anticipate documents to be posted on a webpage on the new site within the next week.
- **Participation:** The bid has been developed and shaped following a series of meetings and interviews with fishermen including creelers, trawlermen and scallop divers (who know the seabed), fishermen's representatives, representatives of wildlife tourism businesses, local community council members and many other local residents with no particular affiliation other than an interest in the sea. An email group has ensured that many people including all

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

of the above have been able to follow progress in developing the bid. A stakeholder meeting on 7th May to consider a bid attracted over 40 people including residents from both Loch Ewe and Loch Gairloch. These included fishermen, wildlife tourism businessmen, other people engaged in loch tourism, local councillors, and a Highland Councillor. The meeting was chaired by retired councillor John Laing. Information was presented about the MPA process by Owen McGrath of SNH.

- **Support** [see also Appendix 1]: There has been support for MPA designation from creel fishermen, scallop divers, tourism businesses, local councillors [formal letters of support to follow], school teachers, young people, older people (including retired fishermen). Some people have not yet expressed a view. At the MPA bid meeting on 7th May there was unanimous support for designation of Loch Gairloch as a MPA. Following a presentation at the Wester Loch Ewe Community Council meeting on 8th May we have received verbal confirmation of their support for part of Loch Ewe to be included in the bid. A letter of support has been provided by Gairloch Community Council. The National Trust for Scotland has confirmed their support for the bid and has expressed strong support for moves to strengthen the protection of marine habitats and wildlife in Loch Ewe and especially the area around its property at Inverewe. The only people who have said they do not support MPA designation are those with family members who are employed in the prawn trawling fishery. As it becomes clearer to the local families who have relatives who work on prawn trawlers that our bid does not include the deeper waters where prawn trawlers currently operate, it is possible that their position will be revised. There are no scallop dredgers based within the local area.
- **Recognition of issues.** Initially our own MPA search area extended from Loch Torridon to Loch Broom. Following extensive correspondence we have refined our bid to the areas outlined above. In consultation with fisheries representatives our aim to include a section of coastal water between Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe within the ncMPA bid has been refined, based on a lack of information of the occurrence of MPA search features in this area, and anticipated opposition from a larger sector of fishermen. We still aim to include part of this area (inside dotted red line on Figure 1) within a r&dMPA bid pending guidance as to how this can be achieved. There is still work to do to discuss how MPA designation will affect proposed developments such as marinas within the area. We do not consider such developments need be a threat to the ncMPA features that we aim to protect and restore.

5. Raising Public Awareness of MPAs and Scotland's Marine Environment

Guideline 6: Raising Public awareness of MPAs and Scotland's Marine Environment

As a premier location for marine wildlife tourism in Scotland, Gairloch already scores highly in terms of raising awareness of Scotland's marine environment. There are already marine wildlife visitor centres in Gairloch, including the Gairloch Marine Life Centre, a purpose built facility to provide marine wildlife information and education. The centre works closely with SNH to provide information to visitors and locals alike about much of the environmental information included in the

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

bid. Since it's construction the centre has provided many educational visits to local primary and secondary schools as well as wildlife groups and of course tourists, all free of charge. We feel that this facility plays a vital role in educating all who visit or stay in the area.

NTS Inverewe Garden and the proposed new museum at Aultbea can provide additional exciting opportunities for raising awareness of the marine environment. NTS already maintain a shore hide near the entrance to the gardens and have plans, through their forthcoming signature project, to enhance the interpretation at the property as a whole. NTS also runs popular seashore safaris with its Ranger Service based at Inverewe. They are very keen to use these to promote the conservation of the adjacent marine environment and this will give access to an estimated 80,000 visitors a year.

Local restaurants already provide some of the best seafood in Scotland. The Old Inn in Gairloch was judged to be Scotland's seafood pub of the year in 2006. Gairloch is ideally placed to promote the need for sustainably sourced seafood from Scottish Waters. Other visitor facilities include some of Scotland's best seaside campsites (Sand, Gairloch, Poolewe); a Youth Hostel at Carn Dearg ideally located for development as an outdoor education centre; Rhu Reidh Lighthouse hostel and marine environment information centre; a new Gairloch and Loch Ewe visitor centre on the seafront at Gairloch, and a new visitor information centre at Poolewe.

Two Lochs Radio covers the Gairloch and Loch Ewe area and interviews with fishermen have been recorded for broadcast later in the year. Information about the bid, including news reports following the stakeholder meeting on 7 May has already been broadcast. The second Gairloch Wildlife Festival developed by the Gairloch Business Association will be held from 21 to 28 June 2012, and provides an additional opportunity for MPA awareness raising.

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society has already developed a Shorewatch programme within the area, and provided data to support this bid. This will be strengthened at a second training workshop in June 2012.

The Marine Conservation Society has already provided support for this bid by alerting local dive clubs of our proposed bid. A group of divers from Black Isle Dive Club carried out two shore dives in Loch Ewe over the weekend of 19/20 May 2012 in search of MPA search features.

Our local biodiversity group, Wester Ross Environment Network will very shortly launch a new website upon which information about the Marine Protected area will be posted . . .

Practical projects

Opportunities for further development of MPA-related projects range from oyster and sea grass propagation and restoration, to snorkel and dive surveys of areas where monitoring is required. We also anticipate a wide variety of school-based projects and activities, e.g. using DVD footage from underwater camera and ROV expeditions within the proposed MPA.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

6. Sources of information

Published information

The two key publications to seabed habitats and MPA search features within the area are:

Dipper, F.A. & Johnston, C.M. (2005). Marine Nature Conservation Review Sectors 15 and 3. Sea lochs in north-west Scotland: area summaries. Peterborough, Joint Nature Conservation Committee. (Coasts and seas of the United Kingdom).

Moore, C. G., Harries, D. B., Trigg, C., Porter, J. S. and Lyndon, A. R. (2011). The distribution of Priority Marine Features and MPA search features within the Ullapool Approaches: a broadscale validation survey. *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 422*.

Publications describing herring spawning on maerl include:

J. A. Morrison, J. C. Gamble, and I. R. Napier (1991). Mass mortality of herring eggs associated with a sedimenting diatom bloom . ICES J. Mar. Sci. (1991) 48(2): 237-245 doi:10.1093/icesjms/48.2.237 <http://icesjms.oxfordjournals.org/content/48/2/237.abstract>

The importance of inshore habitats and maerl beds for juvenile cod and other fish is summarised in:

Bailey, N. and 16 other authors (2011) The West of Scotland Marine Ecosystem: A Review of Scientific Knowledge. Marine Scotland Science Report 0911 www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/295194/0123085.pdf

Other information

Information on seabed habitats and species was kindly provided by following scallop divers: James Cameron, Alastair Hughson, Jane Grant, David Price, Ian Kellett and Peter Davidson, and fishermen Jody McNeil, Terry Jack, Bruce Maclean and David Powrie.

The following fishermen provided information in interviews with Sue Pomeroy about herring spawning grounds north of Melvaig and near Greenstone Point: Roderick MacIver, John Murdo MacKenzie, the late Willie Matheson, Sandy ? (Ullapool), Sandy Patience, Alistair Jack and David Powrie. .

Information on oysters in Shildaig Bay was kindly provided by Christian Gudgeon.

For cetacean occurrence, Sarah Dolman provided data, including data sets from Peter Evans on porpoises in Loch Gairloch area.

7. Acknowledgements.

For guidance as to how to prepare the bid throughout the process, I would like to thank Owen McGrath and Mary Gibson of SNH. For assisting with preparation of the bid document and support throughout, thanks to Prof Barry Blake. Kate Donald and Alex Gray provided detailed comments on an earlier draft of this bid. For help with sea searches, thanks to Garry Bulmer, Nicola Tallach; Judy Revell and Neil McInnes of Black Isle Dive Club, in response to request for support from Calum Duncan of Marine Conservation Society. Thank you to everyone else who has provided information, encouragement and support.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

8. Contact details

For further information about this bid, please contact:

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Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

Appendix 1:

- **Loch Ewe Visitor Information Centre**

As the Director of the Loch Ewe Visitor Information Centre in Poolewe, I receive a huge amount of feedback from tourists to the area. Since opening for the 2012 season at Easter 2012, we have already welcomed over 1000 visitors into the centre. We take great care to welcome all our visitors personally and discuss with them their reasons for visiting the area, their comments on all aspects of their visit and their suggestions for how we could improve their experience.

A huge number of people cite the spectacular coastline and the diversity of wildlife as a major reason for their visit. The brochures that disappear the fastest in the centre are those from the boat operators. Among the most asked questions are where tourists can spot otters and seals, which boat trips are best for viewing dolphins and whales, and what has happened to the fishing industry. A large number of visitors are keen birdwatchers. There are also a significant proportion of visitors who are keen canoeists and kayakers, who refer to the clean, clear, unspoilt waters around the coastline as a major reason for their visit.

Being involved with the tourist industry as I am, I have a keen interest in protecting the marine environment as I can see the importance that this has to the tourist industry, which is far and away the biggest employer and the largest contributor to the local economy.

I fully support the efforts to establish MPAs for Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe and a research and demonstration MPA for the coastal waters of Wester Ross.

Tracy McLachlan
Director
Loch Ewe Visitor Information Centre
Unit L3
Poolewe Village Hall
Poolewe
Ross-shire
IV22 2LD
01445 781771
Info@visitlochewe.com
www.visitlochewe.com

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **Dry Island Shellfish**

Dry Island
Badachro
Gairloch
29.5.12

Dear Sir/Madam

As owner of Dry Island Shellfish, I strongly support the MPA for Gairloch and Loch Ewe.

I run a fish stall at Gairloch Pier during the season and also attend local community and farmers markets.

My Customers, especially European tourists, are increasingly more interested in where the shellfish and fish comes from and how it is caught.

I am very proud to be selling Loch Gairloch creel caught langoustines, squat lobsters, brown crab and lobster. My scallops are hand-dived but I am already having to source my fish from the East coast. I certainly do not want to have to source my shellfish from further afield too.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica Dodd

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **Shellfish Safaris**

Dry Island

Badachro

Gairloch

29.5.12

Dear Sir / Madam,

As owner / operator of Shellfish Safaris, a boat trip that takes people out creel fishing on Loch Gairloch and a commercial fisherman of 30 years, I have seen many changes in the marine environment. I have trawled, netted, potted, long-lined and dredged in Scottish waters for fish and shellfish. I live with my young family in a listed Fish Curing Station on Loch Gairloch and my family have fished these waters for generations. I now catch langoustines and squat lobsters in the loch using creels.

I have come to the conclusion that we need to do something to protect our seabed. Sustainability and Ethically are two words that are banded about but unless we put them into action then words are all they are.

After the decimation of our fish stocks by mobile gear, we were luckily left with a prawn fishery. Once this is gone there is nothing left to exploit unless there is a burgeoning market out there for plankton and jellyfish.

For this reason I fully support the MPA for Gairloch / Loch Ewe and believe it is the only hope for our and our children's future.

Yours sincerely,

Ian McWhinney.

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- Celtic Fringe Tourist Association



I am writing to you as Project Coordinator and secretary for the Celtic Fringe Tourism Association – representing over 150 tourism based businesses in the Wester Ross area of North West Scotland.

Having discussed the possibility of establishing MPA's in this area (Lochs Gairloch and Ewe, and a research / development MPA on the coastal fringes) I can confirm that we would wholeheartedly support this proposal.

The coastline and waters surrounding this area are one of the foremost reasons why visitors come to Wester Ross, and tourism is the main employer and economic driver for the area as a direct result. Gairloch itself is probably the leading centre of the north west coast for marine wildlife, and there are several boat operators working out of the harbour employing local people – a vital contribution to the local industry.

Aside from these sealife trips, many visitors are keen birdwatchers, and we also have a growing number of businesses featuring canoe / kayak activities in and around both Lochs.

Here in 2012, we are approaching our second annual "Wildlife Festival", where we feature all of the above mentioned attractions as a focal reason for visitors to come to this area – establishment of the MPA would almost certainly enhance and develop such a festival, which has significant long term development potential.

We are therefore extremely concerned that the marine environment of Wester Ross is protected and supported in the long term, as this is a core feature of both the area and our local economy.

Regards,

Douglas Gibson, on behalf of

The Celtic Fringe Tourism Association

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- National Trust for Scotland



The National Trust for Scotland fully supports the moves to create a Marine Protected Area in Loch Ewe and Gairloch. As owners of part of this area, notably the foreshore around Inverewe Estate, we are very keen to see measures to improve the conservation of the marine habitats and species in the region as we believe that this will be to the long term benefit of the environment and the local economy. We are particularly pleased to add our voice to the already strong community support for this measure. The Trust's Ranger Service already assists with the promotion and interpretation of marine wildlife through our popular seashore wildlife hide and Seashore Safaris and we look forward to helping to promote this as one of the foremost marine sites in the West Highlands.

Dr Richard Luxmoore

Senior Nature Conservation Adviser
The National Trust for Scotland
Hermiston Quay
5 Cultins Road
Edinburgh
EH11 4DF

Tel 07713 786264

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- Gairloch Community Council (the Council has not yet had an opportunity to formally meet and fully discuss the detail of the bid; this letter is based on a majority of councillors expressing strong support for the bid in principle and instructing the CC secretary to draft a letter of support)

GAIRLOCH COMMUNITY COUNCIL

29 / 05 / 2012

Dear Peter,

On behalf of the Community Council, we would like to offer our support for the question of an MPA for this area. While we do not claim to be experts on the subject, it seems very clear that this is a matter that potentially affects a number of jobs in the area and consequently, the local economy.

This economy is based largely on tourism these days, and our clean, natural environment is of course the abiding reason why people visit Gairloch and Wester Ross. It is therefore clear that we must to our utmost to conserve and protect this valuable resource.

Regards, and on behalf of the Community Council and Gairloch,



Secretary, Gairloch Community Council

C/O The Secretary, Gairloch Community Council, 13 Strath, Gairloch, IV21 2BX

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **Wester Ross Fisheries Trust and Wester Ross District Salmon Fisheries Board**



Both the Wester Ross Area Salmon Fishery Board and the Wester Ross Fisheries Trust fully support this bid. Both Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe are of considerable importance for salmon and particularly sea trout and we believe that MPA status would be highly beneficial.

Loch Ewe is of particular importance for the sea trout of Loch Maree, the fishery for which collapsed in the 1990s and has yet to recover. Attention has focussed on solving problems of sea lice infecting sea trout in the West of Scotland over the past 20 years and WRFT's biologists have collected data to show that sea lice epizootics have adversely affected sea trout health.

However, it is also clear that the general ecological health of the inshore marine environment is of importance to salmon and sea trout. We have observed variation in the growth of sea trout from year to year in response to changes in food availability. The collapse in sea trout stocks in the West of Scotland occurred during the years following the removal of the 3 mile ban on mobile fishing gear. There is good reason to believe that the habitats including maerl beds, eel grass beds and kelp beds on sediment, some of which have been degraded over the past 20 years, are of importance for sea trout. These habitats are areas where sea trout can feed on a wide range of prey species including juvenile fish. They also support alternative prey for the predators of both salmon and sea trout.

Salmon and sea trout link marine ecosystems with freshwater ecosystems. An ecologically coherent MPA within the Wester Ross coastal area that provides a framework for managing and restoring marine habitats and sea fish populations can also bring benefits to the sea trout and salmon populations of the area, and the freshwater ecosystems in which salmon and sea trout are an important component.

John Mackenzie

Chairman WRASFB and WRFT

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **Mr & Mrs Hugh Whittle, Inveran Estate (& River Ewe)**

Support the bid (by email).

- **Mrs Kate Donald, Inverasdale**

Working a croft on the western shore of Loch Ewe, I am struck by how little the loch is used nowadays -- just cruise ships bound for Inverewe; vessels participating in NATO exercises, and for a handful of creels. Keen to practise responsible husbandry of the croft, thereby encouraging biodiversity, it makes perfect sense to support the regeneration of biodiversity of Loch Ewe.

I'm only sorry that the current tick-box exercise for assessing potential MPAs weighs heavily against worthy cases such as Loch Ewe, in which scallop dredging in particular has so dreadfully degraded the loch bed that only modest populations of a few indicator species have survived, and yet there is plenty anecdotal evidence that fish were bountiful within living memory.

An MPA category for sea bed restoration might afford areas such as Loch Ewe the opportunity to recover: a ban on mobile gear and approved areas for anchorage would be very welcome.

K. Donald (Mrs)

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action Forum

Peter Cunningham
Wester Ross Fisheries Trust
Gairloch



30 May 2012

Dear Peter

GALE is a local charity working towards improving the quality of life, environment and economy of the Gairloch and Loch Ewe area. GALE is a membership organisation set up, owned and managed by its members and it's these members that are responsible for the ongoing activities of GALE. All GALE members are resident in the Gairloch and Loch Ewe area have a say over how the company is run.

GALE has developed and supported a series of community projects since it was formed, including operation of the Tourist Information Centre In Gairloch, weekly community markets, and a transition town project focusing on sustainable living. GALE recently opened a new purpose built Visitor Information Centre in Gairloch overlooking Loch Gairloch.

GALE wishes to express its support for the local community bid to establish a nature conservation MPA within Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe, and a research and demonstration MPA for the wider area. We recognise that protection and restoration of biodiversity and sustainable management of the marine environment are of vital importance to the local area.

Yours sincerely

Janet Miles
General Manager

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THIRD PARTY BID FOR MPA FOR LOCH GAIRLOCH AND PART OF LOCH EWE FROM THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC CONVOY MUSEUM PROJECT**

A key economic development for the Wester Ross area is the planned Russian Arctic Convoy Museum which forms part of the Aultbea Regeneration Plan on the shores of Loch Ewe. It will contribute to the growing WWII interest in the area in tourism development terms and add a further economic driver to the area. Tourism is by far the largest contributor to the local economy. The efforts to establish MPA's for Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe are strongly supported as this would contribute greatly to attracting future tourism business. All developments which improve and increase the tourism offer and draw new tourism business to the area are to be welcomed.

The importance of highlighting the legacy of the WWII Russian Arctic Convoys is central to the project plans for a Russian Arctic Convoy Museum in Aultbea, Wester Ross. Loch Ewe was where almost half of the convoys to Russia began their perilous journeys between 1941-1945. Over 3,000 men lost their lives in the convoys, 104 ships were sunk.

The Arctic Convoys of WWII were Britain's means of sending vital supplies and war material to Northern Russia (then part of the Soviet Union). Protected by Royal Navy warships, merchant vessels sailed from British ports to the harbours of Archangel and Murmansk. Although hazardous, this was the shortest route by which Britain could supply Russia. For Prime Minister Churchill, these supplies were a vital demonstration of Allied solidarity. He called the Arctic Convoys 'the worst journey in the world'.

The Museum Project is a key part in the Aultbea Regeneration Plan, together with a new Community Centre, to help bring much needed employment and income potential to the area whose community gave so much support to the war effort in this North West Highland anchorage for the Arctic Convoys. The aim of the project is to create a lasting legacy to all those who took part in the acts of heroism and extreme physical endurance that were the WWII's Arctic Convoys. It is hoped to achieve this within the lifetime of some of the few remaining veterans – hopefully by 2015 which will be the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII. The Museum has recently received its first significant funding from Russia, and is confident that this will continue.

The Museum Project team ran a very successful WWII and the Arctic Convoys Week (7-12 May, 2012) which highlighted the immense interest and support in the subject, from the local community, the wider community and indeed globally. The profile raising enabled the project team to source and unearth new material and contacts, much of which is new and unknown. As part of the week's events a guided walk visited the site of the wreck of the liberty ship, the SS William H. Welsch. A team of divers recorded the wreck, footage of which can be seen on You Tube.

The Russian Arctic Convoy Museum will add a further tourism theme to the Wester Ross area, and, as has been clearly demonstrated with the events organised so far by the Museum Group, this can only grow in significance and reach. All involved in the tourism industry have a keen interest in protecting the marine environment and strongly support the efforts to establish MPAs for Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe and a research and demonstration MPA for the coastal waters of Wester Ross. As a very significant and important step forward in protecting the marine environment, we applaud the proposal and see it as having a key role in the future environmental and economic development of Wester Ross.

Jacky Brookes

Vice Chairman, Russian Arctic Convoy Museum

29 May 2012

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **Sands Caravan and Camping**

From: M CAMERON [mailto:cameron575@btinternet.com]

Sent: 31 May 2012 07:10

To: Wester Ross Fisheries Trust

Subject: Re: Third Party Bid for MPA for Loch Gairloch and part of Loch Ewe

Peter

I would strongly support a MPA in the Loch Gairloch Area. I am a Part time Scallop Diver and can see the wide variety of life in Loch Gairloch and would like to think it will be preserved and perhaps improve in the future. We also run the Sands Caravan and campsite and feel our customers will benefit greatly from the MPA.

James Cameron

Sands Caravan and Camping

Gairloch

Ross Shire

IV21 2DL

www.sandscaravanandcamping.co.uk

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- Wester Loch Ewe Community Council (received 31 May 2012)

WESTER LOCH EWE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The Secretary, 15 Cove, Inverasdale, Wester Ross IV22 2LT
Tel./fax (01445) 781457; e-mail mdenny15@gmail.com

Peter Cunningham
Harbour Centre
Gairloch
Wester Ross
IV21 2BQ

Dear Peter,

I have been asked by our Council to write to you with our wholehearted support for your MPA bid.

As you know, Loch Ewe was badly affected by scallop dredging and illicit trawling in the past and a loch that was once full of fish was depleted. However, there are now some reasonable stocks of the endangered species, skate which must be preserved.

Additionally, we think that a protected area would help local creel fishermen and divers, in an area where employment is scarce. Similarly, it would be a boost for tourism, which again is vital to us here.

Again, there would be potential educational benefits for schools, etc and we would be doing something positive to preserve our precious environment.

We have publicised our support for this and asked if anyone had any objections. We received absolutely none.

Many thanks for all your hard work and effort on this.

Yours sincerely,

Don Nicholson

P.P The Council

Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe Third Party Bid for a MPA: 30th May 2012

- **Hebridean Whale Cruises**

<http://www.hebridean-whale-cruises.co.uk/>

<http://www.facebook.com/Gairloch>

All the crew at Hebridean Whale Cruises and Kerry Sea Angling fully support MPA's all along the Scottish Coast and believe Loch Gairloch and surrounding areas have the natural assets that deserve to be protected.

Nick Davies

- **Sealife, Glass Bottom Boat Gairloch**

Richard and Jill Holmes – Owners of Sealife Glass Bottom Boat

<http://www.glassbottomboat.info>

<http://www.facebook.com/sealife.gbb/info>

Although our business is based on tourism, we are in a unique position to survey the seabed of Gairloch on a daily basis. Our cruising area takes in Sheildaig Bay, Fraoch Eilean, Badachro Bay and Glas Eilean, we only cover a very small area of the proposed M.P.A but the abundant marine life inhabiting this area is phenomenal.

We specifically concentrate on viewing the sandy beds, rocks and Kelp Forests and are constantly amazed at the differing marine life that changes within those areas. Seeing shoals of sand eels in abundance this year is fantastic, these feed the breeding birds we have nesting around the shoreline, if we are not protected, it would be worrying to think that such a food source would become sparse therefore seriously affecting the bird and wildlife surrounding Loch Gairloch.

For most of us it's easy to just see the sea as a vast expanse of water without realising what goes on below the waves encourages and sustains life on shore. Our aim on Sealife is not only to provide passengers with a memorable cruise but to hopefully open their eyes to the beauty and need to maintain such a valuable asset, thankfully people are now appreciating our marine world is so much more than just water.

Seeing the mountains and beautiful vistas at every turn in this area is very real and obvious: it's always easy to get people on board if they thought it was all going to be bulldozed or covered in Pylons and Windfarms, however by not being a MPA the very same could happen to our seabed.

Underwater habitats and the marine life that live there are equally as important but not as tangible to the public, hopefully in a very small way we are beginning to educate people. We are aware that if important areas like the Seagrass and Maerl Beds need protecting, without these the building blocks of much of the marine life would be affected.